DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 255 022 EC 172 081

AUTHOR McLaughlin, John A.; Covert, Robert C.
TITLE Evaluating Interagency Collaborations. State Series Paper (Number 2).
INSTITUTION North Carolina Univ., Chapel Hill. Technical Assistance Development System.
SPONS AGENCY Special Education Programs (ED/OSERS), Washington, DC. Handicapped Children's Early Education Program.
PUB DATE Jul 84
CONTRACT 300-82-0369
NOTE 18p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Agency Cooperation; *Coordination; *Disabilities; *Program Evaluation

ABSTRACT

A procedure is outlined for understanding and evaluating interagency collaboration. Five steps are addressed: (1) understanding the context of an interagency collaboration (stages of development, communication channels used); (2) verifying the need for interagency collaboration (needs for increased client access to services and reduced duplication of services); (3) identifying solutions and plans to meet needs (components of agreements); (4) implementing the collaborative process (monitoring the degree to which the agreement is implemented as designed); and (5) determining the benefits and liabilities of collaboration. The information from the evaluation can then be used to suggest changes to increase accessibility to needed services with the least human and fiscal costs. (CL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Porter

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

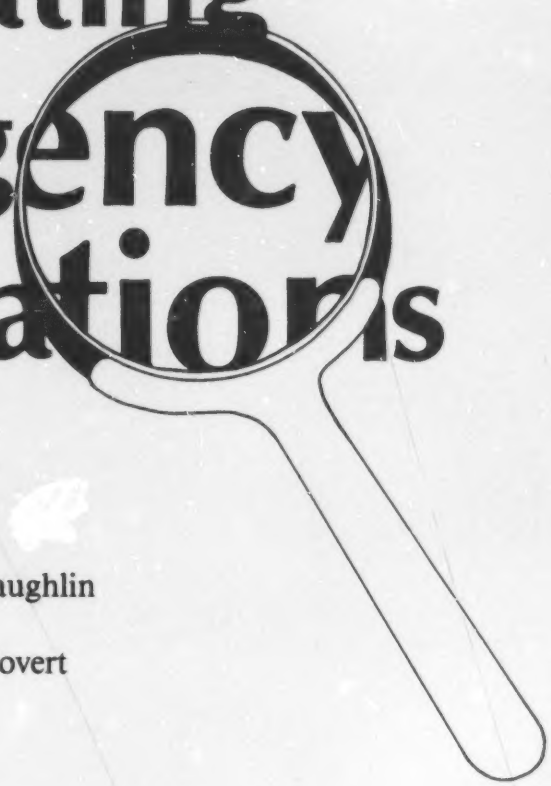
SCOPE OF ...

The Eric Facility has assigned this document for processing to: EC

In our judgment, this document is also of interest to the Clearinghouse noted to the right. Indexing should refect their special points of view EA

ED255022

Evaluating Interagency Collaborations



by
John A. McLaughlin
and
Robert C. Covert

TADS
State Series Paper

2

EC 172081

Evaluating Interagency Collaborations

by
John A. McLaughlin
and
Robert C. Covert

EC172081

Publications Manager: Daniel Assael
Typist: Barbara Wagner
Printing: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

This State Series Paper (number 2), *Evaluating Interagency Collaborations,* was produced by the Technical Assistance Development System (TADS), a program of the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. TADS is located at 500 NCNB Plaza, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514 (tel. 919-962-2001).

This book was prepared pursuant to contract number 300-82-0369 from the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. Contractees undertaking such projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their judgment in professional and technical matters. Points of view or opinions, therefore, do not necessarily represent the Department of Education's position or policy. The contents of this book are presented for information purposes only; no endorsement is made.

Helene Corradino, Project officer to TADS
Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education

Pascal L. Trohanis, TADS Director and Principal Investigator

July 1984

EVALUATING INTERAGENCY COLLABORATIONS

Interagency collaboration is an active process, and efforts to evaluate it must reflect its dynamic, procedural characteristics. Evaluation studies should examine the intent of a collaboration and may focus on one, some, or all of the stages of a collaborative program. Any evaluation study should be designed and implemented to yield information that will satisfy needs of those directing the collaborative effort.

This paper will discuss the role of evaluation as members of an interagency planning team attempt to:

- Understand the context of an interagency collaboration
- Verify the need for the collaboration
- Identify solutions and plans to meet needs
- Implement the collaborative process
- Determine the outcomes (benefits and liabilities) of the collaboration

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

Four kinds of information will help you understand the context in which interagency collaboration takes place:

- The particular developmental stage of the collaboration;
- A description of the agencies and people involved;
- A definition of the terms used to describe the collaboration;
- A description of the channels of communication used in the collaboration.

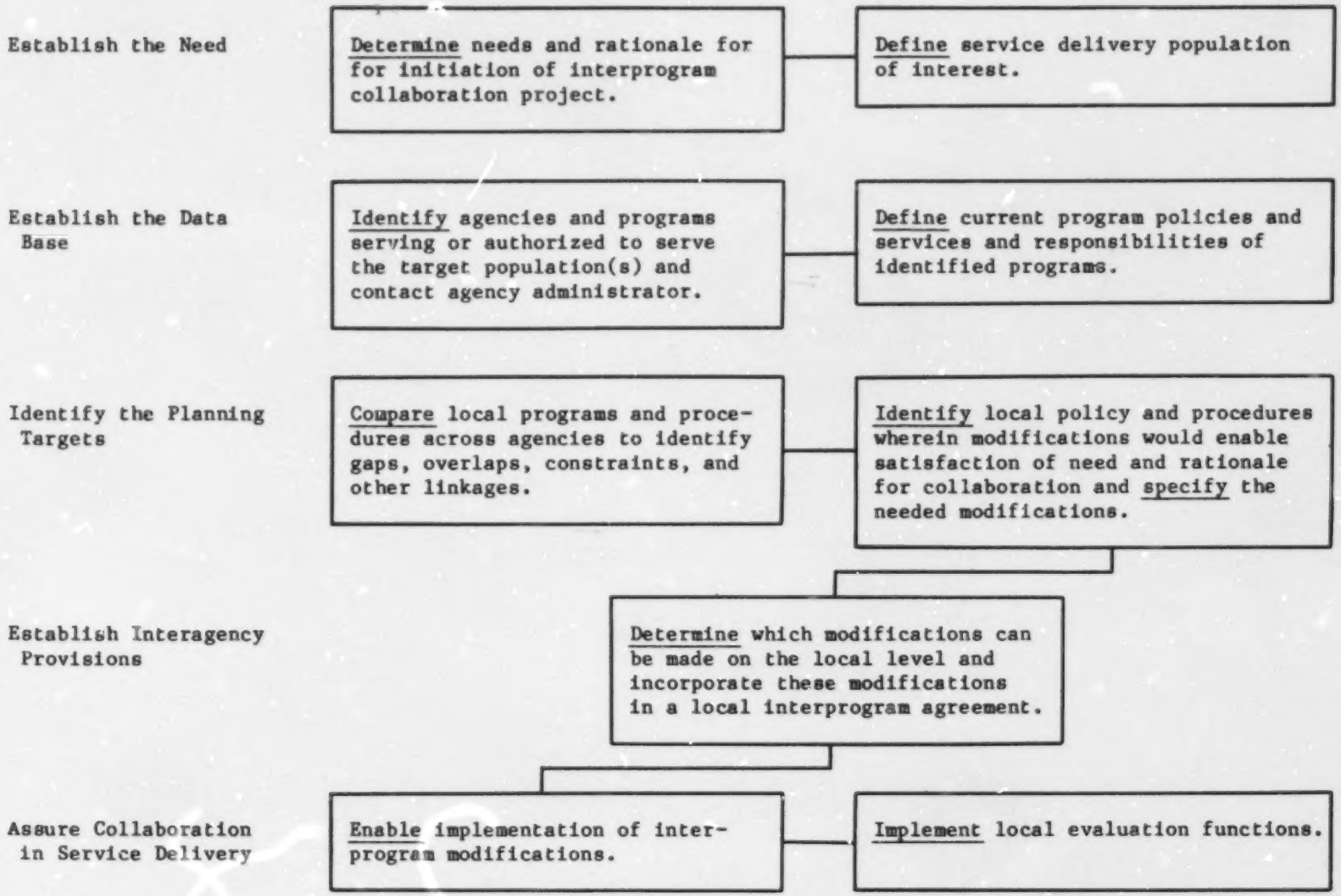
Stage of Development

There are many models or frameworks for the development of interagency collaborative efforts. These set forth the basic life cycle of the collaboration (Figure 1 shows a typical flow of events.)

To begin an evaluation of interagency collaboration, determine the current

Figure 1

A Process Outline for Interagency Planning[1]


Establish the Need
Determine needs and rationale for for initiation of interprogram collaboration project.
Define service delivery population of interest.
Establish the Data Base
Identify agencies and programs serving or authorized to serve the target population(s) and contact agency administrator.
Define current program policies and services and responsibilities of identified programs.
Identify the Planning Targets
Compare local programs and procedures across agencies to identify gaps, overlaps, constraints, and other linkages.
Identify local policy and procedures wherein modifications would enable satisfaction of need and rationale for collaboration and specify the needed modifications.
Establish Interagency Provisions
Determine which modifications can be made on the local level and incorporate these modifications in a local interprogram agreement.
Assure Collaboration in Service Delivery
Enable implementation of interprogram modifications.
Implement local evaluation functions.

[1]Regional Resource Center Task Force, 1979.

state of the collaboration in relation to its life cycle. You may start by interviewing key personnel among the providers, administrators, business managers, and consumers within the agencies involved in the collaboration. Questions addressed in the interview could center on the stages identified in Figure 1. Further, the evaluator could conduct a record review to obtain information which would support the testimony of those interviewed and extend the evaluator's understanding of the program.

Another approach which is decidedly more complex and time consuming, but which may provide more information, focuses on the process of adopting an innovation. If an interagency collaboration is thought of as an innovative approach to service delivery, we can then view its adoption much like an adoption of an innovative classroom practice. The adoption is not a single event; rather, it is a process.

Gene Hall and his colleagues (University of Texas at Austin, Research and Development Center for Teacher Education) developed a framework to assess the adoption of an educational innovation (Hall, 1975). McLaughlin and Elder (1982) translated that framework so that it might be used to determine the operational stage of an interagency collaborative effort. The translated stages are set forth in Figure 2. To determine the stage for a particular interagency effort, evaluation is focused on the following factors or behaviors associated with people engaged in the effort:

- knowledge of interagency collaboration;
- acquiring information about collaboration;
- sharing information within and across agencies;
- assessing/evaluating the agreement or need for agreement;
- status reporting relative to the agreement;
- planning related to interagency collaboration;
- performance of specific individuals as they carry out the agreement.

Concern about the collaboration expressed by the people involved is another factor which may be considered in order to determine the current operational stage of the collaborative program. Again, we have taken from the work of Hall and others. Here we have tried to develop a scale which describes levels of concern (see Figure 3). There are three major levels of concern: those unrelated to the collaboration; those oriented to self and the collaboration; and those related to the degree to which the collaboration is meeting the needs of the client. In our opinion, these levels are directly related to the developmental stages of the collaboration.

Understanding the levels of concern of those involved in the collaboration and knowledge of the stages of development through which a program normally progresses can be a useful combination of information for planners who are trying to decide where to go next. If the interagency effort is at a standstill (Figure 4 shows some common problems), then the information acquired by the evaluator can be used to pinpoint technical assistance which will facilitate movement to the next higher stage of development.

To recap: to begin an evaluation of an interagency collaboration, determine the particular program's current point in the life cycle of a typical collaboration. Investigation may focus on the collaboration process, the adoption (of an innovation) process, or the levels of concern of the people involved in the program. Multiple data-gathering strategies and points of focus are recommended: conduct interviews; review records, reports, and minutes of meetings; and use surveys with interviews to confirm and extend findings. The product of this effort will be an understanding of the developmental stage and a determination of any variables in development across agencies.

Figure 2

DESCRIPTION OF LEVELS OF USE FOR INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION[1]

LEVEL		DESCRIPTION
0:	Non-use.	State in which the user has little or no knowledge of interagency collaboration, no involvement with it, and is doing nothing to become involved.
I:	Orientation.	State in which the user has recently acquired or is acquiring information about interagency collaboration and/or has recently explored or is exploring its value and its demands.
II:	Preparation.	State in which the user is preparing for implementation of interagency collaboration.
III.	Mechanical Use.	State in which the user focuses most effort on the short-term, day-to-day use of interagency collaborative efforts with little time for reflection. Changes in use are made more to meet user needs than client needs. The user is primarily engaged in a step-by-step attempt to master the tasks required to implement the collaboration; this often results in disjointed and superficial use.
IV-A:	Routine.	Use of interagency collaboration is stabilized. Few if any changes are being made in ongoing use. Little preparation or thought is being given to improving collaborative efforts or its consequences.
IV-B:	Refinement.	State in which the user varies the use of interagency collaboration to increase the impact on clients within immediate sphere of influence. Variations in collaborative arrangements are based on knowledge of both short- and long-term consequences for clients.
V:	Integration.	State in which the user is combining own efforts to use interagency collaboration with related activities of colleagues to achieve a collective impact on clients within the community.
VI:	Renewal.	State in which the user reevaluates the quality of use of interagency collaboration, seeks major modifications or alternatives to achieve increased impact on clients; examines new developments in the field and explores new goals for self and the collaborative service delivery system.

[1]McLaughlin and Elder, 1982.

Figure 3

LEVELS OF CONCERN IN AN INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION[1]

I. Concerns About Self
   0. Non-interagency concerns.

II. Concerns About Self as a Member of the Collaboration Team
   1. Where do I stand in relation to the collaboration team?
   2. Do I function adequately in the collaboration?
   3. How do the others in the collaboration view me?

III. Concerns About the Interagency Collaboration
   4. Are the clients getting what we want them to get? Is the collaboration doing what we want it to do?
   5. Is the collaboration meeting the needs of the targets?
   6. How can the collaboration be improved?

[1]McLaughlin and Elder, 1982.

Figure 4

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH ESTABLISHING INTERAGENCY COLLABORATIONS

- Competitiveness of established institutions and agencies.
- Lack of an organizational structure that brings agencies together around mutual interest.
- Parochial interest of agencies that make them myopic to the needs of the broader community.
- Lack of experience in the techniques of coordinating service delivery.
- Awkward interdisciplinary communication.
- Preoccupation with the system design rather than the functional role of the system.
- Client confidentiality across agencies.
- Personal resistance to change.
- Response to external pressures.
- Lack of specific accountability.
- Lack of designated monitors and evaluators.
- Inadequate orientation within and outside agencies.
- Negative staff attitude.
- Lack of consideration of political bases.

Description of Agencies

As needs are identified and potential solutions sought, it will be necessary to understand each agency and its functional relationship to the needs. Also, we we have found that successful planning is more likely if agencies are given a chance to completely describe their services and functions. However, a profile of this sort should not be the only means by which agencies find out about each other. Time must be allotted for all involved in the collaboration to discuss and visit each agency.

The Regional Resource Center Task Force on Interagency Collaboration (1979) suggested that the following information be contained in an agency profile:

- Program Overview
  - -- legislative base (federal/state)
  - -- administrative agency (federal/state)
  - -- general purpose of agency
  - -- client eligibility
  - -- application procedures
  - -- type of funding
  - -- assurances/procedural safeguards
  - -- monitoring responsibility
  - -- sanctions authorized
  - -- policy makers
- Client-Centered Services
  - -- initial client identification (outreach/screening)
  - -- comprehensive multidisciplinary assessment
  - -- individual client plan development
  - -- placement options (treatment)
  - -- service models
  - -- service review (follow-up evaluation)
- Support Processes
  - -- material support (facilities)
  - -- personnel support (certification requirements, in-service opportunities, staffing patterns, etc.)
  - -- fiscal support (patterns of allocation across agency functions)
  - -- planning bodies (advisory groups)

Definition of Terms

Jargon often contributes to conflicts in the planning and implementation of a collaborative activity. So as part of the profile, develop a glossary of terms commonly used by agency staff. A glossary helps participants as they review other agencies' documents and interact with each other. A comparison of the glossaries of all agencies will help all participants develop a common set of reference terms.

Channels of Communication

Who talks to whom? What formal or informal vehicles are used to communicate? What types of information flow through the channels? Have rules been established for the control and flow of information?

Ask participants to construct existing and desired communication paths by graphically depicting the flow of information. Discrepancies between existing

and desired paths can lead to change which will improve the collaborative effort. The desired path of communication can also serve as a standard for future evaluation.

VERIFYING THE NEED FOR INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

Our research has indicated that the following problems are generally cited as reasons for an interagency collaboration:

- fragmented service delivery system
- overlap in service definitions
- multiple funding bases
- varying models for service delivery (e.g., medical or educational)

Fragmented service delivery systems can cause clients to "fall between the cracks" as they try to move from one service to the next. Centralized client management systems can help. In such cases, you may need to gather data substantiating that there are gaps in the system. Interviews and surveys of consumers and key people in agencies and advocacy groups can be useful. Review of records (including consumer complaints or letters of support) are also helpful.

Try developing hypothetical case profiles and moving them through the system from agency to agency. Specifically, ask representatives from each agency to review the profile and talk through the way their agency would approach the problem from referral to evaluation to planning to delivery of services. Comparison of the responses can indicate problems in the current service system and problems that might arise if the agreement is established in a manner contradictory to existent practice.

Often, when service definitions of different agencies overlap, resources are wasted as various agencies work to provide the same services to the same clients. Here it may be useful to identify service responsibilities and functions which are common and unique to particular agencies. Interviews with key agency staff members and a review of agency mission statements and regulations will help identify services.

Multiple funding bases and multiple planning bodies tend to drive agencies in different directions. That is, funds are usually tied to regulations which may or may not be common across agencies. Fiscal calendars may differ. Documentation of the types of funding and the purposes of the planning bodies can help interagency planners. Review of agency regulations and mission statements is imperative.

Finally, variations in models for service delivery may be a barrier to an interagency collaboration. Personnel within different agencies often have different approaches to solving client problems. Interviews and the hypothetical case technique can help determine if variations in approach exist across agencies.

The common thread that runs through the four problems set forth above is increased client access to services and reduced duplication of services. (Note that sometimes conditions exist -- e.g., large number of clients, large geographic area, etc. -- which require that various agencies provide similar services.)

The Human Factor

Human factors play an important part in the success or failure of an interagency mission. Some authors have cast these human factors under the domain of team life (Magrab, no date). An evaluation must constantly examine members of the team. Magrab has developed some simple questionnaires to accomplish that task. Things to look for are: leadership, role clarification, and group atmosphere. Personality conflicts can be most dangerous to group cohesion and accomplishment of a mission.

The evaluation must take into account the sources of conflict in the group (see Figure 5). People manage conflict in a number of ways. Some people come on strong and put themselves in a win-lose situation; others avoid or withdraw from conflict; some will try to compromise or negotiate to alleviate conflict.

Figure 5

SOURCES OF CONFLICT IN INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

The People:	The Environment:
• Value differences: -- personal -- professional -- agency • Role pressures • Perceptual differences • Divergent goals • Status threat • Personality clash	• Lack of resources • Change • Ambiguous jurisdictions • Communication barriers: -- personal -- physical • Dependence on one person/agency for agreement • Complexity of organization(s) • Need for consensus • Regulations

Each interagency planning team is likely to have members who use each of the above styles under certain conditions. If managed appropriately, conflict can cause the group to become creative and look for new and innovative approaches to their problems. Evaluation can identify appropriate and inappropriate conflict management and strategies for communicating to the members the effects of their conflict styles.

IDENTIFYING SOLUTIONS AND PLANS TO MEET NEEDS

An interagency plan will only succeed if those responsible for administering and delivering the services are committed to the need for the collaboration and to the implementation of the plan. This suggests that an evaluation include some early and periodic procedures that will assess commitment.

Continuous feedback and sharing of information is essential. Members of an interagency planning team must keep people within each agency apprised of the status of all plans. The information sharing must include all persons

potentially affected by the agreement: administrators, providers, business managers, and consumers.

According to Elder (1980), when a plan or paper agreement is completed, it should have the following components:

- Clear statement of purpose with goals and measurable objectives.
- Definition of terms central to the operation of the agreement.
- Precise delineation of services to be provided by each agency.
- A statement of fiscal responsibility (if required) for each service provided.
- Designation of roles and responsibilities (within and across agencies) associated with each service or collaborative activity.
- Designation of staff positions within each agency responsible for:
  - implementing the service
  - monitoring the implementation
  - negotiating change when necessary.
- Specification of general administration procedures including:
  - scheduled meetings
  - time period for the agreement
  - client management
  - mechanisms for change.
- Evaluation plan for determining the extent to which the agreement's short- and long-term objectives are met.

All this will look just fine on paper and will serve as an excellent implementation standard for both the project and the evaluation. However, before the plan or agreement is put into practice, we suggest an evaluation strategy that examines the logical, technical, and political structure of the plan. (Here, politics refer to personal interactions surrounding issues of "turf.")

Data that will help you determine if your plan is sound can be acquired by sending copies of the written plan together with a structured rating form to four parties: the planners, agency administrators, representatives of agency providers affected by the plan, and representatives of consumer groups. The primary questions are: 1) Are purposes, goals, and objectives appropriate? and 2) Will these be achieved given the plan's construction?

IMPLEMENTING THE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

During the implementation phase of the collaboration, the evaluation is guided by the plan discussed above. As with any evaluation, two major questions must be addressed by the program managers and evaluators: 1) Is the plan implemented according to design? and 2) Are the objectives of the agreement being met? A clear plan with clear objectives will provide the standards.

At this point, monitoring the degree to which the agreement is implemented as designed becomes a critical component of the evaluation. Data must be derived which provide evidence of what actually is taking place with regard to the delivery of service to the target clients. A mistake often made at this point in the evaluation is to only gather outcome data. When this occurs, all that can be said is: "You have (have not) accomplished this." In order to explain why things turned out as they did, we suggest the development of an implementation checklist associated with each component of the plan. Data

regarding the level of implementation may be obtained through interviews, record review, or both. As a result of this type of evaluation, collaborators can know why something occurred and they can have some suggestions as to what will occur in the future if changes aren't made.

Evaluation of accomplishments is also important; we want to know what we are doing in relation to the agreement and what impacts are being made. Are services more accessible? Are costs being reduced? Is there less duplication of services across agencies? Are more (or fewer) clients being served by a particular agency? Is there a single case management function being performed? Is there common planning?

The specific questions to be addressed at this point of the evaluation depend on the purposes of the agreement. However, your plan must be flexible enough to capture unintended or unexpected outcomes. Monitoring and outcome evaluation concerns will take their direction from the collaboration plan. Be prepared to put both types of data together in order to explain events to decision makers.

DETERMINING THE BENEFITS AND LIABILITIES OF THE COLLABORATION

Most interagency collaborative efforts do not have a termination date, so there is no specific time at which the planners can sit back and look at their accomplishments. When this is the case, outcomes become difficult to gauge. In the evaluation literature, many experts advise that summative judgments of programs not be attempted until the programs reach some degree of stability. Since interagency collaborative efforts are often in a state of constant flux, summative judgments, in the strict sense of the concept, may be inappropriate. Instead, you can periodically focus your efforts on the status of the benefits the collaboration may produce for the participating agencies and their clients (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

PROJECTED BENEFITS FROM THE ESTABLISHMENT OF INTERAGENCY COLLABORATIVE AGREEMENTS

- More accessible services
- Common program standards and uniform methods of accountability
- Single responsibility for case management
- Cooperative identification, evaluation, planning, and service delivery
- An inventory of service capacity at state and local levels
- Clarification of responsibility for fiscal support
- Common planning
- Reduction in redundant services
- Reduction in the total cost of services for persons with handicaps

CLOSING

As indicated at the start of this paper, the evaluation of an interagency collaborative effort depends on the intent of the effort. Therefore, you and your evaluator must determine the audiences, both internal and external to the program, to identify their information needs and expectations. The information gleaned from the evaluation can best be used in the formative sense -- to suggest changes in the current system that will increase accessibility to needed services at the least human and fiscal costs.

REFERENCES

Elder, J. O. (1980). Writing Interagency Agreements. In: J. O. Elder & P. R. Magrab (Eds.), Coordinating Services to Handicapped Children: A Handbook for Interagency Collaboration. Baltimore: Paul H. Brooks.

Hall, G. (1975). Measuring Levels of Use of the Innovation: A Manual for Trainees, Interviewers and Raters. Austin: The Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, The University of Texas at Austin.

Magrab, P. R. (no date). Human Factors in Interagency Teams. In Developing a Community TEAM (pp. 25-33). Washington, D.C.: American Association of University Affiliated Programs for the Developmentally Disabled.

McLaughlin, J. A., & Elder, J. O. (1982). Notes on Evaluating Interagency Collaborative Efforts. Blacksburg, VA: Mimeo, Virginia Tech.

Regional Resource Center Task Force on Interagency Collaboration. (1979). A Guide to Local Level Planning and Development. Washington, D.C.: Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Bureau of Education for the Handicapped.

The Technical Assistance Development System
A program of the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill